

No 33

Hydro-Cyanic Acid

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+ Symptom

An Inaugural Dissertation,  
On the

Efficacy of the Hydro-Cyanic  
acid, in the treatment of Phthisis  
Pulmonalis, Submitted to the

Faculty of Physic

in the

University of Pennsylvania,

By  
John Leigley

Read March 15<sup>th</sup> 1823



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On the efficacy of the Hydro-Cyanic Acid in the cure of Phthisis Pulmonalis.

The subject which I have selected for my essay on this occasion, is one, which has of late engaged a large share of the attention of Practitioners.

I have encountered the subject, not from an expectation of doing it the justice which it deserves, but rather from the peculiarity of my circumstances.

In the early part of my medical studies, this article engaged a very general attention, so much so indeed, that I was induced to regard it more particularly, and especially as I have favourable opportunities of testing its efficacy in the common household of this country.

As the enquiry is entirely experimental, this paper will merely comprise the histories of some cases in which the medicine was tried by my friends, and wherein some cases where I made trial of it myself.

I will now succinctly state the amount of my knowledge of the remedy in the cure of Disease.

In all the trials with it in consumption, the medicine may be safely said to have acted the best of a little

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-atom: But this is all the length I can go in making a statement of its powers, in the cure of those forms of disease.

That it should act empirically so far only, would appear very reasonable from analogy. But experience I fear will lend a hand, in blasting our pleasing anticipations of its curative powers, and in fixing this disease even more strongly, among the reproaches of our art. What my object being rather to give the practitioners of the cases, than to offer general remarks, I can not therefore indulge in any further preliminary, but must proceed to give the cases in detail.

Case 1<sup>st</sup>

I - N - Aged 39 years of a delicate make, and from his apprehensions, I would suppose him to have had a hereditary predisposition to pulmonary disease. He informed me that several of his ancestors had been carried off by it, which confirmed me in my belief of its hereditary origin. I learned from some persons who knew him, that he had been addicted to habits of intemperance for several years, and notwithstanding has generally been healthy.

About 6 Months since he was seized with violent

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comp. difficulty of breathing, with shifting pains in different parts of his chest, being sometimes felt in the shoulder, at other in the back, & at another under the sternum &c. These symptoms have continued with more or less violence from that time until now, May 11<sup>th</sup> 1821. At this date I find added to the former list of symptoms, a very feeble, quick, and irritable pulse. Chills, & sweats have begun to add to his sufferings, and to deprive him of rest for the greater part of the night. His stomach is likewise very irritable, being so much excoriated, as to reject all food of an improper, or indigestible kind. From the whole tenor of his case, I would pronounce him in the commencement of the Scotic stage of Phthisis - sic Pulmonalis.

To meet these circumstances, a recourse to any of the common remedies, if not absolutely useless, would at best be trifling with the life of the patient, he was accordingly ordered the Hydros - Cyanic acid in the proportion of two ~~grains~~ <sup>grains</sup> of Scheele's formula to 30ij of water, twice a table - spoon full every two hours. He was ordered to discontinue the medicine for a time if it produced much nausea, or pain in the head.



May 13<sup>th</sup> The patient does not feel much increase in  
shortness of the indication to 1 inch to 2 inches over the  
same as before. In somewhat better this morning comes  
not so troublesome, and he rested well last night.  
15<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> on the 16<sup>th</sup> as yet there has been no more  
seen or pain in the head. 17<sup>th</sup> The patient not so well.  
18<sup>th</sup> 19<sup>th</sup> He feels a sense of weight, and oppression about  
the chest which is attributed to a want of strength in the  
respiratory system. You may judge from the case that  
was changed somewhat since yesterday. 18<sup>th</sup> The morning  
the medicine has produced a slight pain in the head  
though there is no alteration in the pulse.

21<sup>st</sup> At this date I find the following passage in  
my note book indication of his amendment with  
regard to case last I can not as yet speak cer-  
tainly, but from the favorable appearances  
which were met & anticipate a speedy con-  
-valescence. Since the 18<sup>th</sup> the medicine has check-  
-ed the cough and all the other distressing sym-  
-ptoms... I need here hardly state that their high-  
-brought expectations have never been realized.  
From the 24<sup>th</sup> to the 12 June I visited the patient  
every few days nothing however occurred worthy men-



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patient has exerted a slight attention in his  
pulse for the better being neither so rapid nor irregu-  
lar, but slower, but more regular. The patient  
now regulates the dose according to the state of his sen-  
sibilities as he feels more or less of it, or when  
in the house he sometimes or always takes the  
use of the medicine. June 21<sup>st</sup> Since last visit in  
interview we had his child's cold strength is now  
rather recovering.

Since he commenced the use of the medicine, it has  
taken nearly the same inspiration, viz. then taking  
the dose to 2 grains of water. This day I ordered him to  
increase its strength to 15 drops to 2 grains of water, &  
the same dose to be used as before. He is still  
some pain about the shoulders. 23<sup>rd</sup> This is this day  
much better than at any time since my other  
-dances. His appetite and strength are rapidly re-  
turning, coughs none of any consequence, rests  
well at night, and feels in every respect more  
comfortable than for many months past.  
25<sup>th</sup> To day has so far recovered as to be able to walk  
to town to get his medicine renewed. I may here men-  
tion that the distance which he travelled this day was

[illegible]

about four miles, and as he afterwards informed me, entirely  
- without fatigue. 15<sup>th</sup> Sunday. Since I last saw him  
- about his situation is much as when I last saw him  
- July 7<sup>th</sup>. Frequently heave from the patient vessel  
- and this day saw him myself. Nothing has trans-  
- - in the way of water, and he now appears as before.  
- from this time until October 15<sup>th</sup>. Frequently visit  
- him. During this time he appeared to remain station-  
- - - - - as if he advanced toward a recovery, it was  
- with a very sluggish pace. At the Saturday I find a  
- pretty considerable swelling at the external end of each  
- clauic. One of them appears as though it were about to  
- suppurate, the other, he informs me, is rather more mark-  
- - ing in size. 22<sup>nd</sup> At last visit. 24<sup>th</sup> The swelling  
- which was about to suppurate at last visit, is now  
- discharging copiously. The only alteration produced by the  
- discharge is a slight improvement of his appetite, and  
- possibly his pulse may be somewhat improved.

27<sup>th</sup> General health much as at last visit. The swell-  
- - - - - ing on the left clauic is going on to suppurate, the  
- one on the right, is considerably reduced, though it  
- still discharges freely.

About this time I set out for Philadelphia, but at my

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departure I requested my Friend and Presbter H. P. Dean  
to note any thing worthy of remark during my absence.

The patient used the medicine during the winter, it now  
began to loose its peculiar powers altogether, <sup>the</sup> from its  
frequent repetition or not I will not pretend to say.

The latter difficulty however I endeavored to obvi-  
ate on the early part of my attendance, by alternating it  
with the use of the Sassafras, &c.

On my return I learned that a piece of bone had been  
discharged from one of the abscesses above alluded to.

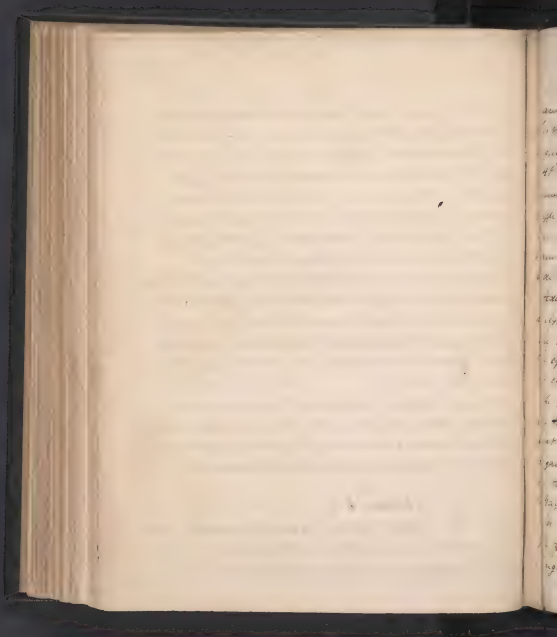
They appear considerably reduced though the discharge  
still continues. His general health I find, worse than  
when I left him last fall. Indeed I have begun to des-  
pair of his recovery.

From unavoidable circumstances I could carry the enqui-  
ry no further in this case, I was obliged to abandon it  
but with a full conviction of the mortality of this dis-  
ease under this or any other mode of treatment.

### CASE 2

J - D - Ninety years of age of a middle sta-  
ture and in every respect proportionate.

From his appearance I would not suppose his disease to



have arisen from any ~~respiratory~~ <sup>respiratory</sup> prostration of the system. I am uncertain whether there are particular organs into the subject.

At this time - May 12<sup>th</sup> 182. he labours under the following symptoms. He is harassed with a constant cough, difficulty of breathing with other or unexpected symptoms. His pulse is quick, frequent and very full. He is aware about his chest being frequently <sup>in</sup> ~~in~~ <sup>in</sup> the side, but most generally it is located about the sternum. Added to this train of symptoms, he has of late been subject to chills and sweats at night. His nights are very restless from the cough. In short the whole of the symptoms in this case are more strongly marked than in case last.

The patient was directed to use the Prussic acid mist in the same manner as it was used by the subject of the last case. The same expectations were laid upon him with regard to the effects of the medicine. However much pain in the head or nausea he was to discontinue it.

May 16<sup>th</sup>. All the symptoms as on the 12<sup>th</sup> 16<sup>th</sup> has now ceased to increase the strength of the expectoration to 15 drops of the gey of water. 17<sup>th</sup> Feels somewhat better this morning, the cough is not quite so troublesome and he

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rested better last night than for some time past.  
18<sup>th</sup> Much as yesterday. 24<sup>th</sup> Since last visit, the gastric  
chills & vomits have been almost entirely subdued.  
The cough is also considerably relieved. June 8<sup>th</sup> This day  
I find his stomach very irritable & he rejects all food  
that he may come taken to relieve this symptom 10 grs of  
Sulphur ~~given~~ <sup>was</sup> ordered, & operated briskly, and re-  
lieved him of this troublesome symptom. His pulse is  
I think, somewhat improved since he began the use of the  
medicines. If I could observe little alteration for the better arising  
from this time till the month of October, when the attack  
began to act rather as a prism. known at this time he  
could not take the smallest dose, without having  
produced some of the symptoms of Gastritis. At this  
stage of my enquiry I set out for Philadelphia, &  
left him labouring under the symptoms of the above  
menstrual disease. These symptoms continued with  
more or less violence until he died which happened  
about a week after my departure.

A case lately occurred, which I will briefly relate, as be-  
ing some analogy to the cases noted in the prelimina-  
ry to this essay.









May 14<sup>th</sup> The symptoms are considerably reduced, but the cough is not entirely removed.

July 2. He informs me that since she commenced the use of the soda she feels, like it might and is not much troubled with the cough, except she exposes herself to cold or wet.

Case 2. Mr B. Applied to me July 18<sup>th</sup> 1821  
for relief in a hæmorrhoidal affection which commenced  
about 4 months since. He complains of weakness  
could perform night marches & suffering of a tough  
frequent matter sometimes streaked with blood.  
No spiritate remittent could find any too large except  
the obstruction of several Colicosa in motion.

1844. He will take 5grs - 3grs - 2grs & take  
the 5grs of acetic in doses of a tabl. spoon full  
every four hours. & then in doses of 100 M. S. S. in  
the day and at any other convenient time  
if the cough should be very severe. He will take  
more than 100 M. S. S. in doses of ten drops  
three times in the day.

July 28 He has taken the medicine as directed  
regularly. He feels well the two last nights and  
his complexion now looks better. This afternoon we



it became fully troublesome, but not so severe as on the 18<sup>th</sup>. The spittle is somewhat streaked with blood the pain is not so bad, and the night sweats have considerably decreased. Medicines continued as before.

Sept 3<sup>rd</sup> I rested well last night and expect to grow fast & stronger. The night he appeared much as yesterday. All the medicines to be continued but the quantity of the Bismarck to be increased to eight drs. to be given 4 times a day. The pulse is 100. The urine acid to be increased every day by one drs. to each dose. To open to be increased pro re nata.

Sept 4<sup>th</sup> His patient seems to be much better. He could last night when the Bismarck was given. The pulse came extended. When the pulse he is much easier. Since he commenced the use of the medicine. On Sept yesterday he had a good deal of head ache, but badly owing to the acid but it has now left him. Increase the Bismarck to ten drs. to be given 4 times a day. The urine as before.

Sept 5<sup>th</sup> He appears no better than on the 2<sup>nd</sup>. He was not badly last night the cough incessant. Medicines continued as before.

Sept 6<sup>th</sup> Being of the opinion that nothing was

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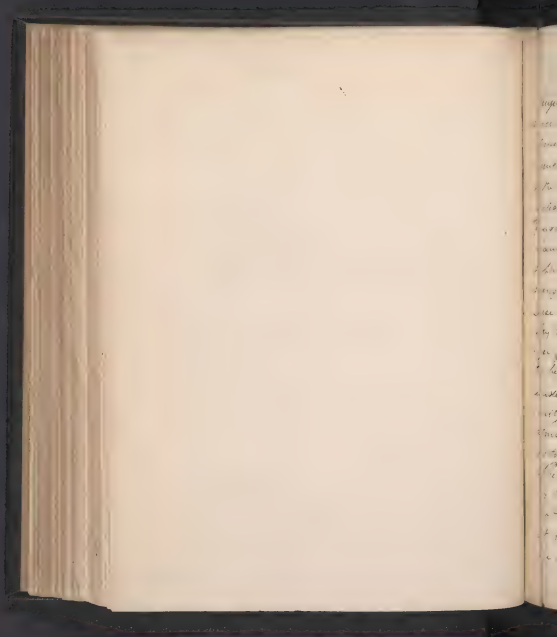
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Aug<sup>st</sup> 15<sup>th</sup> She has continued to use the Chinese and  
 since it was last described and appeared much im-  
 proved of the cough but no striking declension in strength.  
 August 22<sup>nd</sup> Saw her in four weeks she had taken some  
 of the loose very soft pills which she was taking  
 called Purg. pills. but she is somewhat more <sup>now</sup> full  
 & rough and different & breathless since the discon-  
 tinuance of the medicine. I gave more attention to her  
 cough but not breathing. presently its  
 shew<sup>ing</sup> the <sup>1</sup> prescriptive line leads to giving of water.  
 I see the same as before.

Aug 25<sup>th</sup> Last night I was called up by a messen-  
 ger from my patient, who stated that she appeared  
 to be dying. I went to her and found her <sup>now</sup> shew<sup>ing</sup>  
 under great oppression about the chest, and diffi-  
 culty of breathing. her pulse was so frequent with  
 almost incessant to being numbered and so weak  
 as to be scarcely perceptible.

When in great oppression & was trans-  
 ferred to the bed where she had lately been, and  
 was certainly dying. At all events. ~~There~~  
 it was incident to discontinue its use gave  
 her frequent and large doses of Purg. pills which

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appears to relieve her distress considerably.

28<sup>th</sup> She is still declining rapidly, but appears to be less restrained in her breathing. She takes nothing but Elis. Purg. She expectorates large quantities of pus mixed with blood.

Although she felt no pain in her breast in the commencement of her disease, yet occasionally during its progress it was pretty severe, for which, she was bled, and used other remedies. This patient died on the 29<sup>th</sup> August.

In conclusion I will give the general history of a case, in which the Halliattian Powers displayed by our medicine, were more unequivocal, than in any I find recorded.

Mrs G - aged 28 years had long laboured under a predisposition to Pulmonary disease.

In the summer of 1821 the symptoms became more fully formed and shortly after, it displayed its whole frightful train of concomitants.

Prematurely, or about the development of the disease, the ordinary remedies were had recourse to, but with little, if any, relief.

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After this time nothing but palliatives were ad-  
-ministered, and with <sup>the</sup> ~~new~~ the Hydro-Cyanic A-  
-cid was directed in the usual dose probably diluted.

I kept no particular account of the case as  
in the fall of the same year I set out for Philadel-  
-phia. The medicine was continued through the  
winter. My former friend & Preceptor A. S. Dean  
on my return informed me, that the medicine had  
so far acted as a palliatum that the patient for a  
considerable time regained his flesh and strength,  
and that he for a time was flattered into a hope  
of his final recovery. But sad disappointment  
soon followed the bright anticipation, for he lived  
at the same time to relate the melancholy tale  
of his relapse; which, finally in the September of  
1822 had its interesting victim to an untimely  
grave.

